**Synthesis of external reviews – for June 2015 retreat**

**Summary and key insights from Africa RISING WA external review commissioned by IITA**

***Management, Partnerships, Human Resources, Communication***

* An impressive range of R&D partners, communities, private sector, NGOs and other USAID funded projects is involved in the project at different points and with different roles.
* R4D platforms at different levels to be inaugurated or strengthened and role of R4D platform actors to be clarified and facilitation provided as a matter of urgency. Avoiding bureaucratization of a process that is expected to be innovative.
* Africa RISING should not focus on dissemination but on packaging research results and technologies and making these available to development partners, especially other USAID funded project through formalized linkages. This would attract support to Africa RISING.
* Monitoring and evaluation at activity level not happening because no indicators or targets been set.
* Lack of coordination of activities at community level by the partners in Mali, re-engaging IER in Mali as national partner.
* Capacity limitations at all levels but addressed through training and staff recruitment.
* Draft log frame should be finalized with measurable indicators for each output and a theory of change.
* Agree on a clear vision beginning with farmers and other agric-sector actors to establish and roll out the research agenda, and include other actors who will be responsible for promoting/disseminating research outputs.
* Communication and knowledge management***:*** Much of the communication strategy to date has been targeted at higher level stakeholders rather than project participants on the ground. Consideration should be given to targeting R4D platforms and farmer groups.

***Research***

* In Ghana, the “Technology Parks” established in each village are an appropriate approach for testing technologies and dissemination through farmer-to-farmer extension activities, not suitable for some livestock SI practices
* Land & water management activities are mostly long-term (understanding hydrology and modelling processes) and carried out outside of technology parks; there is need to address the immediate problems (either too much or too little rain) and demonstrate these in the technology parks
* Socio-economic studies and trade-off analyses needed to identify scalable technologies
* Carry out research on wider adoption and adaptation of tested innovations to learn about performance of SI technologies and contribute to research on appropriate scaling approaches
* No research on appropriate scaling approaches carried out. Should include network mapping adoption studies who is using what, why and how by different typologies and gender
* Develop and implement gender strategy that pays attention to possible consequences of ongoing change through technology adoption (who benefits?)

***Data Management***

* Ensure appropriate use of PMMT and address the concerns of scientists about access for publications; provide further training, include data from NARS

***Future***

* Monitoring technology use
* Clearer targeting with more linkages of research activities
* Seizing opportunities for irrigation
* Strengthening of the crop –livestock integration (crop residue use, improved fallows maximizing fodder production from food crops)
* Addressing livestock health delivery systems
* Seize opportunities for sharing lessons with Humidtropics, Dryland Systems and Water, Land and Ecosystems CRPs
* Addressing three farming systems for intensification:

a) rural with growing population density and pressure on land with need for integration of crop and livestock production with feed produced from within the system

b) peri-urban environments high land scarcity, high population, crop-livestock integration

Both can be intensified through exchange of resources between animal- and plant-based enterprises, mainly manure use for crops and crop residues for livestock, animal draft power for crop production

c) high population and high land scarcity where crop and livestock production separated to become specialized enterprises with greater value added with purchased inputs. Opportunities to intensify livestock production unrelated to on-farm resources should be considered

**Summary and key insights from Africa RISING ESA external review commissioned by IITA**

***Management, Partnerships, Human Resources, Communication***

* Achievements include a wide range of functioning partnerships, increasing stakeholder collaboration, addressing priority bio-physical, genetic, NRM, livestock fodder production, poultry, postharvest and nutrition constraints. Initiatives to link Africa RISING with other USAID programs.
* Regional log frame requires updating using measurable and gender sensitive indicators and targets guided by a theory of change. This will help prioritizing activities for the remainder of this phase and confirming ideas for the future.
* Much of the communication has been targeting at higher level stakeholders with less attention to R4D platforms, framer groups and other project beneficiaries.
* In Malawi, no researchers from DARS (national program) involved in Africa RISING but needed for long term sustainability.
* Purposes, functions and plans of R4D/Innovation Platforms need further clarification and agreement by members through ongoing facilitation during establishment and early operation. Build on existing structures (e.g. agricultural, welfare, environmental committees); link up platforms at different levels. Platforms need to be more inclusive (private sector and NGOs, value chain actors).
* Economists and gender experts from IITA and partner institutions to form a communty of practice.

***Research***

* Some opportunities for SI not addressed as these are not complying with USAID mission priority value chains (potatoes in Babati, sunflowers in Kongwa/Kiteto, cotton in Ntcheu).
* Farmers have established associations for e.g. dairy, sunflower production and processing; these associations should be included in the Africa RISING research activities. The National Grain Legume Platform in Malawi should be involved in identifying constraints and opportunities for intensified legume production.
* Closer integration between Africa RISING research activities and those of other projects in the same areas.
* Develop stepwise SI recommendations based and low, medium and high input productivity options reflecting farmer typologies and based on ex-ante and ex-post cost-benefit analysis.
* The project should make sure that all technologies promoted have the necessary clearance from the respective authorities (e.g. doubled up legumes from the Agric. Technology Clearing Committee in Malawi).
* Long term landscape NRM research is required; however, there is need for interim outputs within the current project phase (e.g. recommendations on distances between contour bunds, dimensions of fanya juu and the tree and grass species to be planted on them). Establish demonstrations and training sites for water harvesting techniques.
* Given resource constraints of soil fertility inputs, both labor and cash, maximizing the agro-economic efficiency of input use must be a key objective of soil fertility management. Without such an approach, resources will be wasted and production boosts inadequate.
* Study the maize value chain to identify challenges and opportunities for intervention by stakeholders that can address the scaling of better postharvest and storage handling. Particular attention to be given to gran sheller ownership, credit needs, cost-benefit analysis of improved storage options, warehouse and business management. Present study to R4D platforms to identify the private sector partners to address the opportunities.
* Prepare a nutrition research program cutting across Tanzania and Malawi focusing on children <24 months and pregnant women in different household categories.
* Cost-benefit analysis of SI technologies to be continued as a routine procedure before and after farmer testing.
* Initiate gross margin or partial budget approach with women and men farmer groups to establish viability and acceptability of technologies, system sand enterprises.
* Ensure gender and youth issues being addressed through participatory evaluation occasions.
* Mapping of other actors in the intervention areas is needed to build on their work and create synergies.

***Data Management***

* Consideration needs to be given to data generated by i) CG partners where data are only part of wider activities (e. g. breeding for MLN tolerance) and, ii)NARS and universities that may be difficult to incorporate in our data management system
* Further training an mentoring for all scientist needed on implementing the data management plan

***Future***

* Address aflatoxin problem and postharvest issues in Malawi.
* The project should support production of QDS of legumes and vegetables to overcome seed shortages by linking with regulators and inspectors.
* Monitoring technology adoption with a gender lens.
* Developing and implementing plans for learning.
* Clearer targeting with more careful linking of research to derive synergies between on- and off-farm resources.
* Strengthen research on crop-livestock interaction and integration; new animal feed opportunities (crop residues with better preservation, better fallow,use maximizing food production from food crops).
* Addressing livestock health delivery systems.
* Seizing opportunities for irrigation nod wetland use.